NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5584 MARCY 7, 1978
FRED BROWN/NEW DELHI

SAVING A CHOLERA LAB

ANNCR:

A RESEARCH LABORATORY IN BANGLADESH RESPONSIBLE FOR MAJOR ADVANCES IN CHOLERA RESEARCH AND TREATMENT IS FIGHTING TO STAY IN OPERATION. CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN OF OUR SOUTH ASIA BUREAU SENT THIS REPORT.

VOICE:

THE LABORATORY WAS ESTABLISHED IN WHAT WAS THEN EAST PAKISTAN, UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE NOW DEFUNCT SOUTHEAST ASIA TREATY ORGANIZATION. IN RECOGNITION OF ITS CONTRIBUTION. TO THE FIGHT AGAINST CHOLERA AND RELATED DISEASES -- MAJOR HEALTH PROBLEMS IN THIS REGION -- THE GOVERNMENT OF NEWLY-INDEPENDENT BANGLADESH AGREED TO CONTINUE THE WORK OF THE LABORATORY AFTER THE 1971 WAR. (OPT) CHOLERA AND OTHER DIARRHEAL DISEASES ARE LISTED AS THE NUMBER ONE CAUSE OF DEATH AND DISABILITY IN BANGLADESH, AS THEY ARE IN MANY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (END OPT).

THE CHOLERA RESEARCH LABORATORY HAS BEEN CREDITED WITH MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STUDY OF CHOLERA'S COURSE AND EFFECTS. WHILE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EFFECTIVE LONG-LASTING CHOLERA VACCINE CONTINUES TO DEFY SCIENTISTS, DOCTORS AT THE BANGLADESH LABORATORY HAVE DEVELOPED TREATMENT TACTICS THAT CAN CUT DEATH RATES TO LESS THAN ONE HALF OF ONE PER CENT.

ALTHOUGH THE LABORATORY HAS RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM MANY COUNTRIES, OVER THE PAST EIGHTEEN YEARS THE BULK OF ITS FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND MOST OF THE SCIENTIFIC DIRECTION HAVE COME FROM THE UNITED STATES. SINCE 1974 THE FACILITY HAS BEEN KEPT GOING AS A PROJECT OF THE U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

HOWEVER, THE U.S. AGENCY'S FOUR YEAR AGREEMENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH IS DUE TO EXPIRE AT THE END OF SEP-EMBER, AND WHILE THE UNITED STATES HAS OFFERED TO CONTINUE ITS SUPPORT AT ABOUT THE SAME FINANCIAL LEVEL--ABOUT TWO MILLION DOLLARS A YEAR -- IT HAS SAID IT WILL DO SO ONLY IF THE LABORATORY BECOME A TRULY INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTION AND IF OTHER COUNTRIES DEMONSTRATE THEIR DESIRE TO KEEP IT GOING BY TAKING ON A GREATER SHARE OF THE COST.

AT AN INFORMAL MEETING OF DONOR COUNTRIES LAST DECEMBER IN DAKAR, THERE WERE STRONG INDICATIONS THAT SUCH SUPPORT WOULD BE FORTH COMING. REPRESENTATIVES FROM FIFTEEN COUNTRIES AND A NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AGREED ON THE NEED TO CONTINUE AND BROADEN THE WORK OF THE LABORATORY WHILE TURNING IT INTO AN INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH RESEARCH.

WJL/PY